

DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Volume 1 | Issue 1

Article 4


2015

Churches of Christ, Spiritual Formation, and the Liturgical Christian Calendar

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Recommended Citation

Horn, Wes (2015) "Churches of Christ, Spiritual Formation, and the Liturgical Christian Calendar," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol1/iss1/4>

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Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Churches of Christ, Spiritual Formation, and the Liturgical Christian Calendar

Wes Horn

Abstract: For many Christian traditions, participation in the liturgical year does not seem remarkable; in fact, it is second nature being the form, or liturgy, through which congregational members grew up practicing their faith. However, for those Christian traditions, like the Churches of Christ, who have avoided the liturgical year, the inclusion of liturgical practices is a substantial deviation in worship theology, practice, and comfort.

This article recounts one congregation's journey through the Liturgical calendar as a test case for a Doctor of Ministry project. The thesis questioned whether the introduction of the liturgical Christian calendar into the worship life of the Orient Street Church of Christ would help lead to the spiritual formation of its members. To test this thesis, the Orient Street congregation followed the holy day cycle of the liturgical Christian calendar. They were surveyed before entering the liturgical year and then again at the end. The two surveys were then compared to see if measurable spiritual growth had occurred. According to the surveys, growth did occur.

It was in those first couple of months that I fell in love with liturgy, the ancient pattern of worship shared mainly in the Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Episcopal churches. It felt like a gift that had been caretaken by generations of the faithful and handed to us to live out and caretake and hand off. Like a stream that has flowed long before us and will continue long after us. A stream that we get to swim in, so that we, like those who came before us, can be immersed in language of truth and promise and grace. Something about the liturgy was simultaneously destabilizing and centering; my individualism subverted by being joined to other people through God to find who I was.

Nadia Bolz-Weber

Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint

Time is important. It affects us all. Whether a teacher planning out his school year or a farmer determining when to sow her crop, time directs our path. Time shows us our priorities, often forcing us to choose between two important choices. It can determine our focus as we work hard to complete a project on schedule. And time directs our journey as we move from appointment to appointment.

The same is true for churches. The liturgical Christian calendar, in pointing the church towards the work of God, keeps the church's priorities in focus as the church journeys through life.¹ Rodney Clapp writes:

What we need to appreciate is that liturgy before the printing press was quite vigorously a communal and social affair. It was a corporate enactment and celebration of God's presence. In other words, people participated. And they did not imagine their liturgy confined to a "sanctuary," segregated from the surrounding public. Early Christians met liturgically in tenements, forums, shrines and cemeteries. Worship could raucously spill out of a cathedral into the streets of cities and suburbs.²

My Doctor of Ministry project through the Hazelip School of Theology at Lipscomb University tested the thesis that the introduction of the liturgical Christian calendar into the worship life of the Orient Street Church of Christ would help lead to spiritual formation for its members.³

What is the Christian Year?

The Christian year is the cycle of days and seasons drawing the church into a rhythm of life mirroring Jesus. During the first part of the Christian year, the holy days, the church experiences the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus as well as the arrival of the

¹ S. Wesley Horn, "Formed by Time: Living the Liturgical Year," *Leaven* 22 1, (2014): 43-44. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol22/iss1/11> (accessed August 18, 2015).

² Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 119.

³ To view a more complete description of my Doctor of Ministry project, visit: <http://www.lipscomb.edu/hst/upload/file/74183/wes%20horn%20dmin%20project%20final%20draft-2.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2015).

Holy Spirit through the days and seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost. The second half of the Christian year, ordinary time, invites the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to become Jesus in the world.⁴

The Christian year is more than just intellectual worship; it is designed to engage the whole person. Through the use of special days, colors, and religious symbols, the liturgical Christian year draws all parts of a person into the cycle of the life of Jesus. By living out the life of Jesus, the church can “remember the presence of God in the past, celebrate it in the present, and anticipate the presence of God in the days to come.”⁵

Why the Liturgical Christian Calendar?

The liturgical Christian calendar has the potential to benefit the Orient Street Church in several ways. First, as the congregation engages in the cycle of the Christian seasons, its members have the opportunity to participate in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as well as celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Such participation in the biblical narrative potentially prompts congregational members to live out the biblical story in their own lives.

Second, the introduction of the Christian calendar provides believers at Orient Street with the opportunity for personal reflection, confession, repentance, and rededication as disciples of Jesus. This can be most clearly seen in the season of Lent. Finally, it provides an opportunity for members of Orient Street to join the larger Christian community in its celebration of the life of Jesus.

The Christian Year and Churches of Christ

Introducing the liturgical Christian Calendar into the worship life of a Church of Christ congregation, though, is not a simple project. Edward Shepard notes a major objection free churches, like the Churches of Christ, have towards the Christian calendar: free churches tend to reject any practice that does not find its explicit origins in Scripture.⁶

The issue is authority. The focus on authority is connected to the goal of the “restoration of primitive Christianity,” which is an important

⁴ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 21.

⁵ Martin F. Connell, *An Introduction to the Church's Liturgical Year* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997), v.

⁶ C. Edward Shepard, “Observing the Christian Year as a Means of Facilitating Spiritual Growth,” *Review and Expositor* 106 (Spring 2009): 222.

part of what Churches of Christ were attempting to achieve at their inception and what many embrace today.⁷ Therefore, if the practices of following a liturgical calendar or honoring specific days as special are not found within the Bible, then the natural DNA of Churches of Christ calls for their exclusion.

If the liturgical Christian calendar is going to be introduced into the Churches of Christ, one must address this issue because, from the time of the split between the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ, most writers within Churches of Christ have opposed any association with the Christian calendar.

For example, David Lipscomb, responding to a question regarding having a Christmas tree in the “church house,” wrote: “Bible never authorized any celebration of the birth of Christ. To engage in worship not ordained by God is sin. This we regard as beyond dispute.”⁸

Foy E. Wallace Jr. suggested the roots of the Christian calendar grew out of the Roman Catholic tradition and are therefore unacceptable in the church.

Thus out of their own imagination, according to their own will, and by presumptuous human authority, the men of Roman Catholicism have set up feast days for religious observance, in violation of new testament [sic] teaching against the observance of days and seasons (Rom. 14 and Gal. 4), and the will-worship of men (Col. 2) condemned by Paul.⁹

Writing in 1950, Roy E. Cogdill asserted that the Christian year practices of the Catholic Church did not arise from Christian Scripture, but from two other sources of authority placed alongside Scripture: the Pope and tradition. According to Cogdill, neither are acceptable nor useful if one is trying to “look like the New Testament Church.”¹⁰

⁷ Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1-2.

⁸ David Lipscomb, “Christmas Trees”, *Questions Answered*, ed. M. C. Kurfees (Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1921), 106-107.

⁹ Foy E. Wallace Jr., *Bulwarks Of The Faith* (Oklahoma City: Foy E. Wallace Jr., Publications, 1951), 153.

¹⁰ Roy E. Cogdill, “What is Wrong with Roman Catholicism?” in *What Is Wrong?* ed. Thomas L. Campbell (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., 1950), 143.

This is the consistent witness and vision of Churches of Christ throughout most of the twentieth century. Yet other voices are emerging within the Churches of Christ. These voices take a different view of tradition and authority and what it means to look like the New Testament church.

Richard Hughes understands the trend to be moving from the Bible as the pattern to “Jesus as the pattern for authentic human life.”¹¹ This idea of “Jesus as the pattern for authentic human life” is what the Christian calendar seeks to instill in the life of congregational participants. Wes Crawford notes four reasons for this movement: 1) renewed interest in the Old Testament by Church of Christ scholars, 2) “rapidly losing appeal” for the three-part hermeneutical formula, 3) greater value for biblical scholarship, and 4) desire for the church to conform “to the image of Jesus Christ.”¹²

This movement has led several congregations within the Churches of Christ to incorporate the practice of different parts of the Christian calendar into the worship life of their congregations today. For example, the University Church of Christ in Malibu, California, has held special Advent services and a special Seder meal in preparation for Easter.¹³ The Highland Church of Christ, in Abilene, Texas, has begun hosting a special Ashes service on Ash Wednesday in preparation for the season of Lent.¹⁴ The Conejo Valley Church of Christ in Thousand Oaks, California, acknowledges the season of Lent by having forty days of special events and service projects.¹⁵ The Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, in Nashville, Tennessee, has practiced Advent, Christmas, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter as part of their liturgical rhythm for the past several years.¹⁶

¹¹ Hughes, 367. Also, see C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990).

¹² Wes Crawford, *Shattering the Illusion: How African American Churches of Christ Moved from Segregation to Independence* (Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013), 168-169.

¹³ *Holy Week Schedule* available at: <https://chaplainlem.wordpress.com/2012/03/30/easter-week-at-pepperdine> (accessed August 28, 2013).

¹⁴ *Ash Wednesday* available at: <http://www.highlandchurch.org/ash-wednesday> (accessed March 20, 2014).

¹⁵ *40-Day Events and Service Projects: Calendar for Special Events and Service Projects* available at: <http://www.conejochurch.org/2007/content/index.php?id=141> (accessed March 20, 2014).

¹⁶ John Mark Hicks, E-mail message to the author, March 24, 2014.

A few years ago, in response to a noted need to increase the place and voice of Scripture in their worship services, the South Newnan Church of Christ in Newnan, Georgia, a noninstitutional congregation,¹⁷ began following the *Book of Common Prayer's* lectionary. Although there was no specific intention to incorporate the practices of the Christian calendar, because the cycle of readings from the lectionary corresponded with the liturgical seasons, their minister at the time noted they were able to “put more emphasis on *some* of the holidays that the lectionary highlight[ed], namely Easter and Pentecost.”¹⁸

Josh Graves noted the Otter Creek Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee, has celebrated Advent, the Lent-Easter seasons along with Holy Week for at least the last four years.¹⁹ During the Lenten season, the church partnered with other liturgical churches in the area to experience Ashes together. Graves noted that at Otter Creek the theme of Holy Week is often tied to issues of justice in the city of Nashville. When asked why Otter Creek incorporated parts of the liturgical calendar, Graves offered two reasons. First, he noted how following the Christian calendar connected Otter Creek to the church through the ages. It allowed them to feel like they were a part of the Great Tradition of the church. In addition, Graves stated when they follow the Christian calendar, they were aware they were not doing it alone. They made a point to remind their members that Christians throughout the world were practicing the same rhythms they were. So, in addition to connecting them to the historic church, by following the calendar they also connected with the contemporary universal church.

Even though it might not be the norm to experience the liturgical Christian calendar within the Churches of Christ, more churches are becoming convinced of its value, the theology behind it, and the spiritual benefits it offers their congregation.

¹⁷ The noninstitutional movement within the Churches of Christ refers to congregations that believe there is no biblical authority to contribute funds from the church treasury to institutions such as children's homes, Christian colleges or schools, or mission agencies. For more information see: David Edwin Harrell, Jr., “Noninstitutional Movement,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas A. Foster, et al. eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 567-569.

¹⁸ Christopher Cotton, E-mail message to author, August 9, 2013.

¹⁹ Josh Graves, Telephone conversation with author, August 7, 2013.

Missional

One spiritual benefit of following the Christian calendar is the possibility a congregation might be encouraged to live the life and call of Jesus experienced in the liturgy, or as mentioned above, live out “Jesus as the pattern for authentic human life.”²⁰ This liturgical call to live out the life of Jesus closely resembles the call of the Missional movement.

A church is missional when it “is a community of God’s people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very nature, God’s missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ.”²¹ A major goal of a missional church is to encourage people to join the *mission of God* rather than acting as consumers who watch from the pew. Being missional entails participation in the story or activity of God in this world.²² This is precisely what the Christian calendar seeks to encourage.

If the first half of the liturgical yearly cycle, the holy days, is intended to draw the church into the mission of God in the world through the story of Jesus, then the second half of the cycle, ordinary time, is intended to allow the church to live out the story of Jesus in the world as it continues God’s work and mission through the leading of the Holy Spirit.²³

When the liturgical Christian year is viewed through the lens of the definition of the missional church movement, three compatible points arise.

First, both the missional church and the liturgical Christian year move the main focus away from the church and place it on the work of God in the world.

Second, just as the missional church focuses on living out the biblical witness of God’s work in the world, the church, as it participates in the liturgical Christian year, also bears witness to the story of God’s work in God’s creation.²⁴ As Phyllis Tickle writes, “it is the observance of

²⁰ Hughes, 367.

²¹ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), xv.

²² Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 18.

²³ Bobby Gross, *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 227.

²⁴ Darrell L. Guder, et. al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 11.

the liturgical year that tells over and over again through all the years of our lives the Story that informs us and that we are fulfilling."²⁵

Finally, the missional church focuses heavily on the fact it is through the power and participation of the Holy Spirit the church fulfills its calling in the world.²⁶ Webber echoes the church's dependence upon the Holy Spirit when he writes that "in Christian-year worship and spirituality we call upon God for a new breaking in, a fresh outpouring of his Spirit."²⁷

The wedding of the liturgical Christian year with the missional church movement seems not only possible but also exciting and enriching. Both share the same starting point (God), the same goal (the living out of God's mission in the world), and the same power source (the Holy Spirit). This merger identifies the liturgical Christian year as a powerful tool for a church in its desire to live out the story of God in creation.

By "practicing" the story of God in Christ, over and over, year after year, through the liturgy of the Christian year, the church is better equipped to leave the building and live out the story in God's created order. The story ceases to be something the church studies, it becomes who the church is. Within this story and identity, the Orient Street Church of Christ desires to grow.

Intervention and Method—Mixed Methods Research Project

I chose two different measurement tools to gather information in determining whether or not members of the Orient Street Church of Christ experienced spiritual growth after participating in the holy days of the liturgical year. For the quantitative portion of my research, I used a multiple-choice survey.²⁸ Researchers originally developed this brief, four page, 30 question survey to help chaplains in the health care profession evaluate the spiritual needs of those they were asked to serve. For the qualitative portion, I used an appreciative inquiry, four-question

²⁵ Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year: The Spiraling Adventure of the Spiritual Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), xx.

²⁶ Van Gelder, 18.

²⁷ Webber, 38.

²⁸ *Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality for Use in Health Research: A Report of the Fetzer Institute/National Institute on Aging Working Group* (Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute). To view a copy of the survey visit: [http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/resources/attachment/\[current-date:tiny\]/Multidimensional_Measurement_of_Religiousness_Spirituality.pdf](http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/resources/attachment/[current-date:tiny]/Multidimensional_Measurement_of_Religiousness_Spirituality.pdf) (accessed August 18, 2015).

interview.²⁹ The goal behind employing this measure was to discover the ‘why’ behind the outcomes of the multiple choice survey.

Research Procedure

The first set of surveys went out to the congregation before the beginning of Advent for the 2012-2013 Christian calendar year. I gave the congregation the entire Bible class time to finish the surveys. Before the members began the surveys, I read and explained the two-page cover letter and consent form to the congregation. I gave them time to look over the cover letter and consent form and to ask any questions they might have had. After signing the consent form, they filled out the survey, which I then collected and stored in a locked drawer in my office. Consistent with the consent form, no one but myself had access to the completed forms.

Following the completion of the surveys, the next four Sunday morning Bible classes introduced the congregation to the liturgical Christian calendar. The first Sunday offered an explanation of what the Christian calendar is, how it works, and basic definitions of the different special days and seasons. The second Sunday took the congregation deeper into the design and theology of the Christian calendar. We discussed and explained the structure, colors, and symbols. The next Sunday, the relationship of the Christian calendar to the Jewish festivals was discussed. The relationship of the Christian calendar to the grand narrative of Scripture and the life of Christ was explored as it relates to the holy days of the calendar. Next I discussed the living out of the life of Jesus by the church—the theme of ordinary time. The final Sunday morning Bible class was dedicated to answering questions that the congregation had about the liturgical Christian year. After addressing the congregation’s questions and concerns, I provided the congregation with a schedule of how the Christian year would proceed.³⁰

The Christian New Year of 2012 began December 2 with the first Sunday in the season of Advent. The congregation participants experienced the liturgical Christian calendar in multiple ways. First, the Sunday sermons focused on the seasons of the Christian calendar. The text for the sermons followed the Scripture readings from the Revised

²⁹ M.L. Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (New York: Alban Institute, 2004).

³⁰ To view a copy of the schedule, see Appendix 1 – Sermon Series: Liturgical Seasons and Subjects.

Common Lectionary. Second, each Sunday the bulletin article explored an additional facet of the current liturgical season usually deriving from one of the lectionary readings not covered in the sermon. In addition to the sermons and bulletin articles, informational handouts were provided to the congregation for each of the liturgical seasons. Each seasonal handout included a brief description of the liturgical season, the number of days, the color, and the visuals or symbols of the season. It also listed the lectionary readings for the duration of the season. We used liturgical symbols and colors throughout the worship experience for the congregation, applying each liturgical season's color to the bulletin and worship PowerPoint slides. I included symbols for each of the liturgical seasons on many of the slides used during the worship services. Finally, the congregation experienced a special Good Friday service.

For this project, the final Sunday celebrated in the holy days cycle was Trinity Sunday, the Sunday following Pentecost Sunday, which fell on May 26, 2013. On Sunday, June 2, 2013, I re-administered the multiple-choice survey to the congregation during the Sunday morning Bible class. Congregational participants used the whole Bible class to complete the survey. A small percentage were not present. Over the next few weeks, those absent had the opportunity to complete the survey. After the participants finished filling out the survey the second time, they were collected and stored in a locked drawer in my office. No one but myself had access to the completed forms.

The final step was to administer the appreciative inquiry interviews.³¹ I chose to wait one month from the last Sunday of the holy days cycle to begin the surveys. This was purposeful in order to see if involvement in the liturgical Christian year made any lasting impression on the congregational participants. After the month had passed, I created

³¹ The four questions used in this appreciative inquiry were:

1. Tell me about a time when you realized that a decision you made was based upon the meaning of the seasons of the Christian year. What was happening? Who was involved? What was forming about this event?

2. In what ways have you seen the liberating work of confession in your life? Did the season of Lent help in creating this environment of confession? Give a specific example. What people were involved? What was liberating about the event?

3. Since participating in the liturgical Christian calendar, have you experienced a new rhythm in your life? How would you describe this rhythm? How does it affect your day? Your relationships? Your decisions?

4. Consider how participation in the liturgical Christian calendar has influenced your view of God. How might your picture of God changed? Have you noticed an increase in anticipation for spiritual events? If so, can you offer an example?

a schedule to meet individually with those selected to participate in the interviews, which were held in my office at the church building. When those volunteering to undergo the interview arrived, I explained the survey to them. I acknowledged their rights and privacy; I gave them the opportunity to back out of participating. All volunteers chose to continue with the interviews. I recorded the interviews on my iPad, which is password protected. Consistent with the consent form, no one but myself has access to the videos.

In addition to video recordings of the interviews, I also took handwritten notes. At the end of the interviews, each participant had the opportunity to review my handwritten notes to make additions and to check for accuracy. At this point, they had the option to withdraw their interview. If they chose to withdraw, I would hand them my handwritten notes and delete their video immediately from my computer. All volunteers gave their approval to the notes and chose to allow their interviews to be used for this study.

Observations, Outcomes, and Goals

Congregational Observations

1. Participating in the liturgical Christian calendar encouraged spiritual growth.

Based on the gathered data, it is clear the inclusion of the liturgical Christian calendar did influence the Orient Street congregation towards spiritual formation. Of the eleven sections of spiritual life measured, the average congregational movement was positive in all sections. Of the thirty-nine questions measured, all but three questions showed positive movement.

In regards to the appreciative inquiry surveys, all responses given were positive towards the effects of the Christian calendar. Four specific positive examples were consistent throughout many of the interviews. First, many felt their participation in the Christian year provided them with a better direction for their lives. One respondent noted the rhythm of the calendar helped bring their life into focus. Another said the story of God that led them to faith was more clearly seen when following the Christian calendar. The next positive example discovered in the interviews dealt with self-examination and judging. One person said their experience with the liturgical calendar, particularly Lent, let them to stop judging the faults of others and more closely examine their own lives. Another interviewee noted how the liturgical practices caused them to

continually analyze their behavior. A new respect for confession was the third positive aspect to be mentioned by most of those interviewed. One person referred to confession as beautiful, while another, who had much experience with confession through Alcoholics Anonymous, said that for the first time they saw a connection between confession and their faith. The final positive outcome that most all interviewees mentioned is that their experience with the Christian calendar led to the formation of a better picture of God. One participant added that their newfound picture of God included a stronger realization of God's love for them.

2. *Participation in the liturgical Christian calendar had a greater effect on women.*

Although the men of the congregation showed signs of spiritual growth after going through the Christian calendar, the positive movement of women within our congregation far exceeded that of men. When evaluating the thirty-nine questions measured, women were either equal to or greater in percentage growth in all but eleven questions when compared to the men.

3. *For the greatest benefit, participation in the liturgical Christian calendar needs to be an ongoing process, not a one-time event.*

The genius of the liturgical Christian year is its repetition. Although participation in the Christian calendar produced measure of spiritual growth, the real test comes as a congregation participates in the calendar again and again. For example, most of those who agreed to be interviewed stated in their interviews that they desire for Orient Street to continue some form of participation in the liturgical Christian calendar. Of those with this desire, some requested additional information on the different seasons and devotional guides for Lent. They feel that these additions will enhance their spiritual experience when living through the Christian calendar again.³² Joan Chittister would agree:

Drawn like a magnet, year after year, into the life of Jesus in the Gospels, the triumphs of the feasts, the lessons of the seasons, the cycles of spiritual challenges, and the lives of the great spiritual heroes who have gone the way before us, the Scriptures and its scenes, the questions and answers that

³² For more on how participation in the year after year repetition of the Christian calendar can produce greater spiritual formation, see Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), specifically his section on ritual, pp. 8-9; also, Connell, pp. 4-5.

lie there begin to sing in my heart. Every year, the images and meanings get clearer and clearer . . .³³

Kimberlee Ireton seems to sum up the desires of these interviewees when she writes:

Rooted in time, in community and in the greatest, truest story of all, the church year focuses our attention, moment by moment, season by season, year after year, on the one thing that is needful, enabling us to enter together into the very life of God as he enters into life with us.³⁴

Personal Observations

1. *The Liturgical Christian Calendar, at its best, is lived out within community and not individually.*

Although the Liturgical Christian Calendar was new to the Orient Street Church of Christ, it was not new to me. I had been intentionally following the rhythm of the calendar for the previous five years. For me, following the cycle of the Christian seasons felt like I was participating in something designed just for me. It was a welcome homecoming.

Being an introvert, I had believed that it was enough for me to live into the Christian calendar by myself. But, as we began following the Christian calendar as a congregation, I noticed an excitement for each of the upcoming seasons I had not experienced when following the calendar by myself. For example, the journey through Lent took on new meaning when given the chance to give and receive encouragement when fasting.

This excitement was not confined to my relationship with Orient Street. I found that reaching out to the pastors of the liturgical churches in our community also provided a sense of camaraderie I had not expected or experienced when following the Christian calendar myself.

2. *Preaching through the Revised Common Lectionary is a healthy and disciplined experience for ministers.*

The lectionary structure provides a more holistic approach to preaching. Instead of picking and choosing—and ignoring—certain sections of Scripture, the lectionary encourages a more encompassing

³³ Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year: The Spiraling Adventure of the Spiritual Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 42.

³⁴ Kimberlee Conway Ireton, *The Circle Of Seasons: Meeting God in the Church Year* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 16.

approach to preaching and Scripture. Thus, while preaching through the Christian calendar and following the lectionary, the congregation and I were called to wrestle with passages not studied before. Also the Old Testament, especially the Psalms, played a greater role in sermon preparation.

3. It is an exciting and healthy experience to learn alongside the congregation and not just teach towards it.

It has been my experience as a minister that most of my time is spent teaching. Although there are members of the Orient Street congregation who have an extensive knowledge of Scripture and theology, most do not.

This journey through the Christian calendar has given the congregation and me a chance to learn together, side by side, as we went through the Christian seasons. I found it exciting to not simply share facts and lessons but to explore scripture together with the congregation.

Outcomes

1. Congregational participants enjoyed the rhythm of the liturgical Christian calendar.

One outcome of this project is the joy members received from participating in the liturgical Christian calendar. For some, it came from a connection to family who were already oriented to it. For others, it created a desire to learn more about something they had never experienced. Still for others, they found joy in learning more about God and the Trinity as they worshiped through the story of God found in Scripture and the calendar.

2. Congregational participants want to continue with the inclusion of the Christian calendar in the worship life of Orient Street Church.

Another outcome of this project is the desire for the Orient Street congregation to continue the practice of following the Christian calendar. Of those who expressed this desire, many wanted to expand the experience. For example, they requested the church provide them with devotional literature and guides, especially for the Lenten season. They also asked if, in addition to the Good Friday service, the congregation could observe a Christmas Eve and Ash Wednesday service.

3. Congregational participants connected with the larger Christian church through participation in the liturgical Christian calendar.

One unexpected outcome was the connection created between Orient Street and some of the liturgical Christian congregations in the community. Some members have family in these other congregations.

Multiple people mentioned how they were able to connect with their family on a spiritual level previously unavailable.

In addition, the articles written for the church bulletin, covering the different liturgical seasons, were published in the two local newspapers. This also led to a connection between Orient Street members and those in the community.

Goals for Future Work

Based on the observations and outcomes, I concluded my project with five goals for moving forward:

First, Orient Street will continue the practice of the liturgical Christian calendar.

Second, the congregation will be provided devotional guides for each liturgical season.

Third, additional liturgical events such as a Christmas Eve service will be added.

Next, we will expand participation with community liturgical churches in seasonal events.

Finally, although spiritual growth was identified through the research process, actual missional behavior has not been as identifiable. A fifth goal is to harness the missional impulse of the Christian calendar in such a way as to infuse within the Orient Street congregation the desire to live out the witness of Jesus experienced in the liturgical life in their everyday experiences.

Conclusion

The overall response to this experiment was a positive experience for the Orient Street Church of Christ. Spiritual growth was observed and many have encouraged the continued practice of the Christian calendar. Just as God, in the Hebrew Bible, worked to form the Israelite people through their feasts and sacrificial schedule, so today, the church has the opportunity to join in the story of God and be formed by this story so as to incarnate the living Christ within our congregations. In doing this, we hope to go into our community doing the work our God has prepared for us to do.

Appendix 1

Sermon Series: Liturgical Seasons and Subjects

Date	Holy Day	Sermon Themes	Scripture Reading
Dec. 2	1st Sunday of Advent	Love	Jeremiah 33:14-16
Dec. 9	2nd Sunday of Advent	Joy	Malachi 3:1-4
Dec. 12	3rd Sunday of Advent	Hope	Zephaniah 3:14-20
Dec. 23	4th Sunday of Advent	Peace	Micah 5:2-5a
Dec. 25	Christmas	The Gift of God	Luke 2:1-14
Dec. 30	1st Sunday after Christmas	The Son of God	Luke 2:41-52
Jan. 6	Epiphany (Wise Men)	The Wise Still Seek Him	Matt. 2:1-12
Jan. 13	1st Sunday after Epiphany	Baptism of Jesus	Luke 3:21-22
Jan. 20	2nd Sunday after Epiphany	Confession of St. Peter	Luke 9:18-20
Jan. 27	3rd Sunday after Epiphany	Conversion of St. Paul	Acts 9:1-18
Feb. 3	4th Sunday after Epiphany	Presentation of Jesus	Luke 2:22-38
Feb. 10	Trinity Sunday	The Transfiguration	Matt. 17:1-8
Feb. 13	Ash Wednesday	When You Give, Pray, & Fast	Matt. 6:1-21
Feb. 17	1st Sunday in Lent	On Being Tempted (OBT)	Luke 4:1-13
Feb. 24	2nd Sunday in Lent	OBT: By 'Good Idols'	Luke 9:28-36
Mar. 3	3rd Sunday in Lent	OBT: To Remain Fruitless	Luke 13:1-9
Mar. 10	4th Sunday in Lent	OBT: To Judge the Repentant	Luke 15:1-32
Mar. 17	5th Sunday in Lent	The Anointing of Jesus	John 12:1-8
Mar. 24	Palm Sunday	Welcoming Jesus	Luke 19:28-44
Mar. 25-30		Holy Week	
	Mar. 25 Monday	Jesus Anointed	John 12:1-11
	Mar. 26 Tuesday	Jesus Lifted	John 12:20-36
	Mar. 27 Wednesday	Jesus Betrayed	John 13:21-32
	Mar. 28 Maundy Thurs.	Jesus Serves	John 13:1-17
	Mar. 29 Good Friday	Jesus Crucified	John 18:1-19:42
	Mar. 30 Holy Saturday	Jesus Silent	John 19:38-42
Mar. 29	Good Friday	Good Friday Evening Community Service	
Mar. 31	Easter	Jesus Alive!	Luke 24:1-12
Apr. 7	2nd Sunday of Easter	Jesus Appears	John 20:19-31
Apr. 14	3rd Sunday of Easter	Jesus Appears . . . Again	John 21:1-19
Apr. 21	4th Sunday of Easter	Jesus and the Father	John 10:22-30
Apr. 28	5th Sunday of Easter	Jesus and a New Command	John 13:31-35
May 5	6th Sunday of Easter	Jesus Heals	John 5:1-9
May 12	Ascension Sunday	Jesus Ascends	Luke 24:44-53
May 19	Pentecost Sunday	The Spirit Descends	Acts 2:1-21
May 26	Trinity Sunday	Hear, O Israel	John 16:12-15

S. Wesley Horn met and married his wife Rebecca while at Lubbock Christian University. They have three sons: Caleb, Noah, and Gideon. Wes received his B.A. in Liberal Arts from Lubbock Christian University in 1994. He continued at LCU, completing his M.S. in Bible and Ministry in 1996. Wes furthered his education by receiving a graduate certificate in Ministry Studies from Eastern Mennonite Seminary in 2011 and a graduate certificate in The Radical Free Church Movement from Spurgeon's College in 2013 before being accepted to Hazelip School of Theology at Lipscomb University, where he received his Doctor of Ministry on May 3, 2014.

Wes and Rebecca began full-time ministry work with the Greenville Oaks Church of Christ in Allen, Texas; from 1995 - 2002 he served as their youth minister. From 2002 - present, Wes has served as minister of the word for the Orient Street Church of Christ in Stamford, Texas.